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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: PRESIDENT'S CHIEF OF STAFF RESIGNS

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Within days of the one year anniversary of President Yar'Adua's inauguration, the resignations of two of his key staff members, Chief of Staff General Abdullahi Mohammed and Principal Secretary to the President Steve Oransanye, were announced. Both men also served under former President Obasanjo and are closely allied to him. Their exit is expected to curb Obasanjo's influence within the current administration, particularly inside the President's office, commonly referred to as "the Villa." Despite the changes, former President Obasanjo still maintains considerable influence and has key contacts in all branches of government. No information has been released on who may be appointed to fill the now vacant positions. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) The presidency announced May 29 the retirement of the Nigerian presidency's longest serving Chief of Staff, General Abdullahi Mohammed. Mohammed served three Nigerian presidents (Abdulsalami Abubakar, Olusegun Obasanjo and Umaru Musa Yar'adua); however, his influence reached its peak during the eight-year Obasanjo administration. According to Presidential Spokesman Segun Adeniyi, Mohammed voluntary retired; however, observers believe his departure may be part of a larger effort to remove Obasanjo loyalists from President Yar'Adua's cabinet and immediate staff. Mohammed is widely regarded as a close friend and political ally of former President Obasanjo.

¶3. (U) Biographical Note: General Abdullahi Mohammed emerged on the Nigerian political scene in 1975 as one of the key players during the bloodless coup that saw the ouster of General Yakubu Gowon and marked the emergence of the Murtala Mohammed / Olusegun Obasanjo regime. He has also served as director of military intelligence and Director of the National Security Organization (NSO) now renamed State Security Service (SSS). He retired from government in 1979 along with Obasanjo but was recalled from retirement in 1998 by General Abubakar after his appointment as military president following the death of late General Sani Abacha. End Note.

¶4. (SBU) On June 1, the resignation of Principal Secretary to the President Steve Oransanye (another close Obasanjo associate) was announced. Oransanye joined Obasanjo's administration in 1999 and was a key member of the Obasanjo "kitchen cabinet." President Yar'Adua's office has not released any information on who may be appointed to fill the now vacant positions.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: While the exit of Mohammed and Oransanye is expected to curb some of former President Obasanjo's influence within the current administration and within the President's personal staff, a fair number of Obasanjo loyalists remain both in

the Cabinet and the GON more broadly. Obasanjo remains, according to many, the wealthiest man in Nigeria and maintains considerable influence in Nigeria despite these important personnel changes at the Villa. END COMMENT.

SANDERS